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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BRATISLAVA 000003

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SUBJECT: AMBASSADOR'S FAREWELL CALL ON DEPARTING SLOVAK
FOREIGN MINISTER KUBIS

REF: 08 BRATISLAVA 602

Classified By: Amb. Vincent Obsitnik for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

¶1. (C) Summary: Ambassador Obsitnik paid a farewell call on departing Slovak Foreign Minister Kubis on January 2, expressing appreciation for Kubis,s personal efforts (in sometimes trying circumstances) and Slovakia,s support on a variety of issues important to the United States) particularly Afghanistan) and congratulating Kubis on his appointment as the Secretary General of UN,s Geneva-based Economic Commission for Europe. Kubis also offered his appreciation for the Ambassador,s contributions to Slovak-U.S. relations, highlighting Slovak entry into the Visa Waiver Program and the October 2008 visit of President Gasparovic to Washington. Kubis expressed pessimism about the short- and mid-term state of Slovak-Hungarian relations, but voiced some hope that both governments could take steps to reduce tensions following both countries, next elections. Their discussion of Georgia will be reported septel. End Summary.

¶2. (C) Ambassador Obsitnik opened his January 2 farewell call on Slovak Foreign Minister Kubis by expressing appreciation for Kubis,s personal engagement with the United States over the past two and half years. Working with a "challenging" prime minister who often speaks off the cuff, Kubis had managed to keep Slovak foreign policy largely consistent with U.S. goals and objectives, particularly on Afghanistan and NATO issues writ large. The Ambassador also welcomed Kubis,s assistance in moving the Visa Waiver Program forward and in securing Slovak agreement to the Bucharest NATO Summit declaration (which contained language on missile defenses that went beyond Prime Minister Fico,s desires).

¶3. (C) Kubis, in reply, voiced equal appreciation for Ambassador Obsitnik,s role, noting that even though the U.S. and Slovakia had differences, we were able to work together effectively. He cited the Ambassador,s personal ties to Slovakia and identity as a Slovak-American as having helped pave the way forward on a variety of bilateral issues, including Slovak entrance into the Visa Waiver Program. He also expressed his appreciation for the personal ties that had developed between the Foreign Minister and Ambassador Obsitnik. Kubis noted that our work on visas had set a useful marker for the EU that Slovakia retained sovereignty on certain key issues. Kubis was also particularly pleased with the Ambassador,s role in arranging President Gasparovic,s October 2008 visit to Washington, which he said was indicative of the real partnership that exists between the U.S. and Slovakia. In this regard, he also praised Secretary Rice and expressed appreciation for their cooperation during his tenure.

¶4. (C) With regard to Afghanistan, Kubis noted that in his departure interviews with the Slovak media he had been making the point that the NATO allies -- particularly the United States -- would be seeking greater contributions from Slovakia in the future. Given the stakes in Afghanistan, he

felt it was important for the Slovaks to really "be a player" on Afghan issues. He encouraged the new U.S. administration to identify the key contributions Slovakia could make and consistently pursue them. He felt that the next Slovak government (elections are scheduled for 2010) would be in a good position both to increase the size of Slovakia's troop contribution and to give those troops a broader, more robust mandate. If greater efforts are required before the 2010 elections, Slovakia might also be able to step up to the plate.

15. (C) In a more general discussion of Slovakia's security contribution to the Alliance, Kubis acknowledged that the armed forces would be underfinanced in the coming years. He welcomed any U.S. assistance (e.g., with deployments in Afghanistan) that would help build and/or maintain Slovak military capacities. Kubis was uncertain about where Slovak policies on missile defense were headed, but raised the question of whether the new U.S. administration might also be rethinking its position. What was important now, he suggested, was preserving the existing Alliance-agreed foundation in anticipation of the April 2009 NATO Summit.

16. (C) Kubis was relatively pessimistic in evaluating the current state and immediate future of Slovak-Hungarian relations. He suggested that what was needed was a new government in Budapest; the current coalition is unable to act decisively and has allowed extremists in Hungary to become the most neo-Nazi, anti-Semitic, and homophobic in all of Europe. The Hungarian government does not support these views, he quickly underscored, but is powerless to contain or address them. Kubis said he expected a future FIDESZ-led

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government initially to be more confrontational on the question of ethnic Hungarians in Slovakia -- thus leading to an increase in bilateral tensions -- but ultimately to be in a better position to reach difficult agreements with Bratislava. Thus, he said he anticipated the pre-election period in Hungary to contribute to "terrible but not catastrophic" tensions and added that he hoped the new U.S. administration wouldn't adopt a reflexively pro-Hungarian point of view.

17. (C) On the question of the education law that President Gasparovic recently returned to parliament, Kubis echoed the Ambassador's view that Gasparovic had made a mistake in not signing it (reftel). Kubis said that the President's decision had been irresponsible and ill-thought-out, although he did not ascribe the action entirely to domestic political considerations. He said that Gasparovic's actions reflected the President's deeply-held views about the Hungarian issue.

As for next steps, Kubis argued that Prime Minister Fico understands how important the law is, but that many of his colleagues in Smer are disinclined to vote for the law now that Gasparovic has vetoed it. Kubis hoped that any changes made to the law to secure its passage don't alter its fundamental objectives.

18. (C) On the questions of Fico's personal attitudes toward the United States, Kubis suggested that the new U.S. administration reach out quickly to make contacts and engage in close dialogue. He acknowledged that the legacy of Iraq and close U.S. relations with former Prime Minister Dzurinda had influenced Fico's attitudes toward President Bush and the U.S., but also noted that the U.S. enjoyed good relations with all relevant Slovak cabinet ministers and ministries. He urged the U.S. to arrange a visit to Washington by parliamentary chairman Paska (a trip that the Slovak embassy in Washington is planning to organize).

19. (C) We will be reporting Kubis's comments on Georgia and Russia septel.

110. (C) Embassy Comment: As usual, Kubis was direct and expansive. On Hungary, he voiced -- for the second time

recently -- the concern that the new U.S. administration will include a number of officials who recall Slovakia and Hungary from the mid-1990s. At that time, given the rule of then-Prime Minister Meciar in Bratislava, he believes the U.S. consistently tilted toward Budapest. He clearly worries that those memories will influence the policies of the new U.S. administration, both on specific Hungarian-Slovak issues and in its more general approach to Slovakia. On the question of a successor, Kubis remained tight-lipped. The latest speculation in the Slovak press has centered on either MFA Political Director Igor Slobnik or current EU Speicial Representative in Bosnia Miroslav Lajcak, but all Kubis would say is that the next minister will continue to wield the most significant role in Slovak foreign policymaking, maintaining the basic division of authority that Kubis and Fico have established. End Comment.

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